

TOWSON URBAN AREA



INTRODUCTION

Towson is the county's urban area (Map 30). The urban area designation recognizes Towson's unique position as:

- 1) the seat of county government;
- 2) the legal center (circuit and district courts);
- 3) an educational center (Towson University, Goucher College);
- 4) a medical center (Saint Joseph's Medical Center, Greater Baltimore Medical Center, Sheppard Pratt Health Systems);
- 5) a corporate center (Lafarge, Black & Decker);
- 6) a commercial center (Towson Town Center, Towson Commons); and
- 7) a community of close-knit neighborhoods that surround and are intertwined within the Towson Urban Area.

Located within the Towson Urban Area is the Towson Urban Center (Map 31). The urban center is envisioned to be a vibrant commercial center, supporting a variety of uses, with a strong commitment to green space and a focus on pedestrian amenities. It contains a concentrated mix of governmental, institutional, commercial, and residential uses. These uses are situated in an environment that encourages people to enjoy a wide range of shopping, dining, and entertainment possibilities.

The seat of Baltimore County Government is located in Towson. The government complex occupies several blocks in the urban center, with several other properties scattered throughout the area. Local businesses benefit greatly from having this large workforce, estimated at between 3,400 and 3,700 people, working in the urban center. The government center attracts professional and commercial business to the area.

Institutions in Towson provide a significant employment base for the region with the combined total of employees for the 14 major institutions estimated at 13,100. The presence of these major institutional uses has attracted ancillary uses related to the service sector, such as finance, real estate, and personal services. In addition to the direct financial benefits, there are intangible benefits that include the provision of excellent health care, well-educated graduates who often continue to live in the area, and visitors to the institutions who patronize local businesses.



Redevelopment within Towson's commercial center has been undertaken to increase the variety of uses, open space, and pedestrian amenities.

Map 30 Towson Urban Area



BALTIMORE CITY



1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 Feet

Data Sources:
Roads: Baltimore Metropolitan Council (1:24000); TIGER File (1:100000)
Study Area/Urban Center: Baltimore County Office of Planning

Baltimore County Office of Planning
GIS - GIS Services Unit

Place Locations

- | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 - County Government | 6 - Saint Joseph's Medical Center | 11 - Lafarge |
| 2 - Circuit Court | 7 - Greater Baltimore Medical Center | 12 - VIPS |
| 3 - District Court | 8 - Sheppard Pratt Health Systems | 13 - Towson Town Center Mall |
| 4 - Goucher College | 9 - Whiting Turner | |
| 5 - Towson University | 10 - Black & Decker | |

Regional and national companies are attracted to Towson and a range of commercial and service companies cater to consumers and businesses.



Towson contains a major regional retail mall and a main street offering a variety of retail shops and services.

The Towson Urban Center contains and is surrounded by residential communities. Housing choices in the Towson Urban Area include apartments, townhomes, condominiums, and single family detached homes, all located within a mile of the urban center. The health of these communities is directly tied to the vitality of the urban center and vice-versa. The Towson Partnership, a non-profit forum for the diverse voices that shape Towson, has instituted a process of community self-evaluation with an emphasis on setting community standards enforced cooperatively by property owners, community associations, and the county.

POLICY

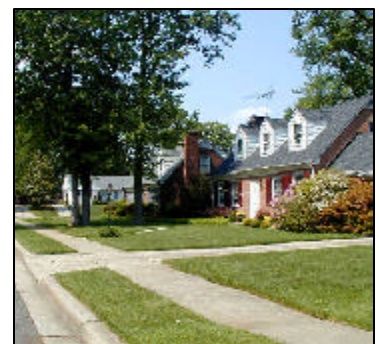
- Implement land use, transportation, community conservation, and urban design recommendations in accordance with the *Towson Community Plan* and the Towson Urban Center Land Use Map (Map 31).

ISSUES AND ACTIONS

In addition to implementing the *Towson Community Plan*, some aspects of the plan need to be reevaluated and/or expanded, particularly concerning land use, the provision of open space, the continued viability of residential neighborhoods, and the economic vitality of the area's businesses.

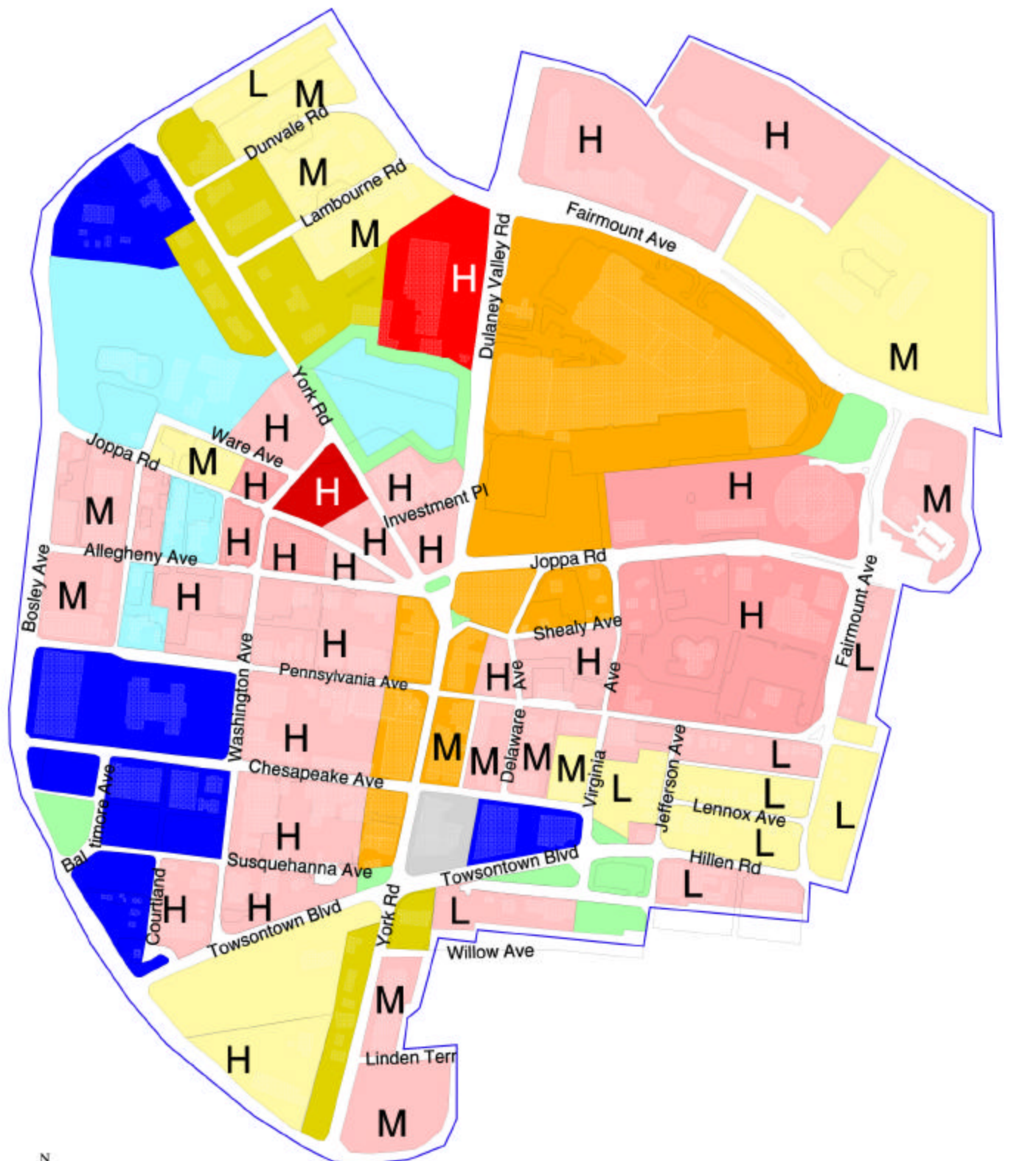
Issue: Ensuring Appropriate Land Use

Land use within the urban center was evaluated by The Towson Partnership, and a land use map designating appropriate types of land use and intensities of development was created (Map 31). Maintaining the character of the surrounding residential communities is of paramount importance, and assuring that these communities are not adversely affected by growth within the urban center is essential. Open space within the Towson Urban Area is scarce, and opportunities to provide additional recreational areas need to be explored. While many of the institutional uses now provide open space, future development of these areas is possible because the majority of the land is privately owned.



Maintaining the character of the surrounding residential communities is of paramount importance.

Map 31 Towson Urban Center Land Use



H - High Intensity
7 stories and above residential or office

M - Medium Intensity
3 - 6 story residential with elevator or
3 - 6 story office with small floor plates
(less than 20,000 S.F.)

L - Low Intensity
single family detached townhouse, 2 - 3 story
walk-up condominium, garden apartments, or
small detached offices in RO and ROA zones

- Residential
- Office and/or Service
- Office and/or Residential
- Office and/or General Retail
- Office and/or Retail and/or Residential
- General Retail
- Cultural
- Government
- Institutional
- Retail Service
- Open Space

Data Source:
Daft, McCune, Walker on Behalf
of The Towson Partnership, Inc.
Baltimore County Office of Planning
OIT GIS Services Unit

Institutions that comprise a significant land base in the urban area include Towson University, Saint Joseph's Medical Center, Greater Baltimore Medical Center, and Sheppard Pratt Health Systems. In addition, Goucher College, the Country Club of Maryland, the YMCA, and Loyola High School provide significant open space important to the entire community. The county will need to foster a working relationship with the Towson Partnership to evaluate and respond to land use changes on these major properties.



The county should also explore methods of providing safe pedestrian and bicycle linkages between these major institutions. In particular, the large student population at Towson University would benefit greatly from safe pedestrian and bicycle access along Osler Drive.

Actions

1. The County Council may consider the following factors when evaluating requests for rezoning:
 - Ensure that zoning changes in the Towson Urban Center follow the *Towson Community Plan* and the Towson Urban Center Land Use Map (Map 31).
 - Discourage commercial land uses from expanding into existing residential communities abutting the urban center by not supporting the rezoning of land from residential to commercial use.
 - Maintain existing zoning density in the residential neighborhoods surrounding the urban center.
2. Review the BM-CT (business, major-commercial, town center core) zoning district for its compatibility with the land use designations identified in the Towson Urban Center Land Use Map (Map 31).
3. Review redevelopment standards of older strip retail commercial areas to provide redevelopment incentives and create buffers between commercial development and residential areas.
4. Develop criteria for infill development within residential neighborhoods to achieve compatibility with existing development.
5. Evaluate local open space criteria for new development to ensure that open space is accessible, safe, and useable.
6. Work with The Towson Partnership to evaluate the area encompassing the Greater Baltimore Medical Center, Towson University, Saint Joseph's Medical Center, and Sheppard Pratt Health Systems. This area contains land that may be suitable for economic development opportunities as well as expansion of existing uses, enabling growth to be limited to the east side of Charles Street.

The county will discourage commercial land uses from expanding into existing residential communities abutting the urban center.



7. Evaluate methods of improving pedestrian and bicycle access between the institutions that share access on Osler Drive. Explore financing alternatives with these institutions and, in particular, with Towson University, whose students would be the prime beneficiaries of any improvements to Osler Drive.
8. Commercial development and rezoning requests along Charles Street between Stevenson Lane and the Beltway, including the Woodbrook area, should be limited to the existing commercially developed properties unless supported through a duly adopted community planning project.
9. Study ways to use available active open space most effectively, including the efficient and equitable rotation of playing fields and community open spaces. Identify small neighborhood sites suitable for acquisition by a community as passive open space.
10. Commercial development and rezoning requests along York Road between the Baltimore City/Baltimore County line and Burke Avenue should be limited to the existing commercially developed properties unless supported through a duly adopted community planning project.

Issue: Implementing Community Conservation Strategies

Residential communities surround the Towson Urban Center. The health and viability of these communities is tied directly to the health of the urban center, and vice-versa. The Towson Partnership has instituted a process of community self-evaluation with an emphasis on setting community standards to be enforced cooperatively by property owners, community associations, and the county.



The county will explore the use of historic designations, loans and grants, and other special incentives to encourage reinvestment in older neighborhoods.

Actions

1. Continue infrastructure repairs, including alleys, sidewalks, curb and gutters, storm drains, and roads.
2. Continue to develop and improve code enforcement strategies.
3. Continue to work with property owners and community associations to upgrade substandard properties.
4. Develop educational programs for landlords and renters to assist in the management of properties and reduce conflicts between renters and homeowners.
5. Explore the use of historic designations, loans and grants, and other special incentives to encourage reinvestment in older neighborhoods.

Issue: Ensuring an Adequate Transportation Network



The Towson Urban Area is served by an extensive road network including York Road, Charles Street, I-695, Dulaney Valley Road, Joppa Road, Fairmount Avenue, Goucher Boulevard, Hillen Road, Burke Avenue, Bosley Avenue, and Towsontown Boulevard. The commuter traffic into and out of Towson continues to be an issue for the urban center as well as the residential neighborhoods. In light of the projected growth of many of the area institutions, serious study and thoughtful solutions will be required to move traffic effectively. Parking within the Towson Urban Center has been an ongoing concern. The apparent perception that parking is inadequate needs to be addressed.

Actions

1. Complete a transportation analysis to determine capacities available given the existing road network.
2. Assess whether the network of one way streets is a barrier to development east of York Road.
3. Analyze commuting patterns to develop and implement traffic management policies that ameliorate the quantity and speed of traffic in residential neighborhoods.
4. Evaluate the parking strategy for the Towson Urban Center.

Issue: Promoting Economic Development and Establishing an Urban Design Identity

The Towson Urban Area has the county's largest concentration of diverse uses: office and retail businesses, government facilities, nonprofit institutions, and restaurants. Major corporate uses include: the headquarters for Lafarge, Black & Decker, Whiting-Turner, AT&T Capital Corporation, and VIPS Incorporated. Towson University, Goucher College, Greater Baltimore Medical Center, St. Joseph's Medical Center, and Sheppard-Pratt Health Systems are major institutional uses. The 960,000 square-foot Towson Town Center mall offers an upscale shopping experience anchored by two major department stores. Towson contains 5,778,500 square feet of office space (occupancy rate 93.5% in 1998) and 1,228,400 square feet of flex/industrial space (occupancy rate 71.5% in 1998).

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Among the issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure Towson's economic vitality are maintaining quality employers, appropriate redevelopment of marginal or vacant properties, and ensuring an adequate marketing strategy.

Part 4



Over the past 150 years, Towson has developed from a small crossroads, to a rural village, and finally into an urban area. The ultimate build-out and visual image of Towson should support the concepts provided in the *Towson Community Plan* and the Towson Urban Center Land Use Map (Map 31).

Actions

1. Establish a mechanism to assemble and market underutilized, fragmented properties for economic redevelopment.
2. Develop a mechanism for obtaining additional liquor licenses for the urban center to promote positive economic development; consider establishing an inventory bank of available licenses.
3. Create a marketing package for Towson highlighting major available properties, both land and buildings, and the amenities offered by the urban center.
4. Maximize Towson's potential to attract major corporations.
5. Expand the Towson Commercial Revitalization District to include the York Road corridor and the concentration of office uses on West Road.
6. Create and adopt a design plan for the Towson Urban Center.